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value. On the contrary, I would wish to enhance the interest and impressiveness of Niagara Falls by making it a rarer spectacle. The reason why people fail to appreciate the beauty of the clouds, of the sunset and of the landscape from their windows is because these are so common. If a bouquet of fireworks were shot off at eight o'clock every night we would not care to look at them. Of course the Falls would be turned on for all legal holidays and as often as there was sufficient demand for it. On such occasions those who wished to go down the current in barrels could enjoy their favorite sport. Weddings would naturally be arranged to come off at a time when the Falls fell. At the hours when the water was prohibited from making a run on the banks, rambles over the eroded rocks and worn channels would be of great interest to the geologist and the tourist. Couples and groups could be photographed at the Falls then, as they are now, by posing them in front of a painted screen.

Many more people would see Niagara and their enjoyment of it would be much greater if it could be seen only on fete days. Thinking they could see it any time, thousands of people have neglected it in favor of some passing show.

Of course, there is something impressive in the thought that the flood pours thundering into the abyss all of the time regardless of sight-seers. But if one has not sufficient imagination to find an equal emotional value in the contemplation of the varied life and industry it supports as it pours through the penstocks and spins the turbines he can swell with satisfaction on the thought of the thousands of years when it was of no use to anybody.

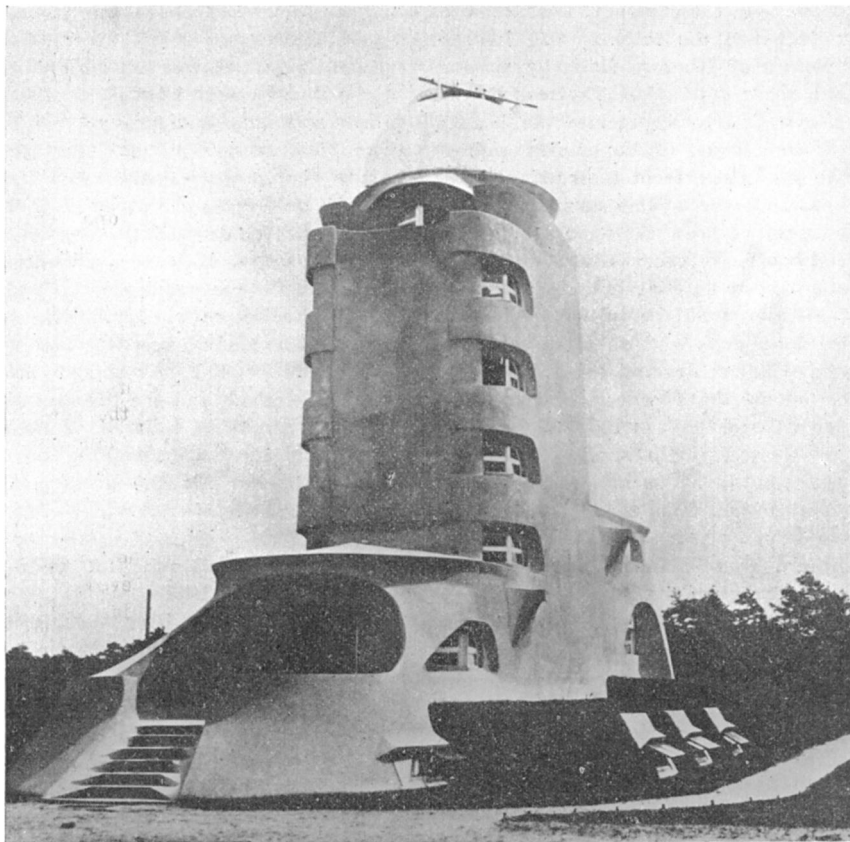
In 1893, when Lord Kelvin stood on the brink of Niagara, he was not so much impressed by its grandeur as he was saddened by the sight of such an enormous waste of power,

and he expressed the hope that he would live to see it all utilized, an observation which was much ridiculed at the time by hard-hearted sentimentalists and unimaginative poets. To them Niagara was a mere spectacle, but to the great scientist, who had devoted his life to the study and exposition of the law of the conservation of energy, it was much more. His prophetic eye could see the poor who might be enriched, the homes that could be made happy, the hungry who might be fed, the naked who might be clothed, and the toiling millions who might be relieved of their burdens by the water dashing upon the rocks below for the amusement of idle tourists.

#### LOOK OUT FOR ALPHA CENTAURI

As if we did not have enough to worry about, what with winter coming on and coal so short and clothing so high, here comes along Professor Ellsworth Huntington, of Yale, with a book on "Climate Changes" which warns us that the stars in their courses may fight against us. He has a theory that the glacial epochs and the lesser disturbances of the earth's climate are largely due to prior disturbances in the sun's atmosphere and these in turn may be caused by the approach or increased activity of certain stars. All the stars, including our sun, are in radio communication with one another, and when one flares up over something it arouses responsible excitement in all the others within range. Then, too, the stars are not "fixed," as we used to think, but are wandering about in various directions, and when two stars come close enough together they become mutually inflamed by the proximity and may become permanently attached.

Now the nearest star to us is the brightest one in the Centaur constellation, therefore named Alpha Centauri. It is only about 25 trillion

*Wide World Photos*

### THE ASTROPHYSICAL OBSERVATORY BUILT FOR PROFESSOR ALBERT EINSTEIN AT POTSDAM

miles away and its light takes four and a third years to reach us. Alpha Centauri is not only big and bright and relatively near, but it is triple and variable. Its two main components are like two suns the size of ours, revolving around one another every 81.2 years. When they are closest they are 1,100,000,000 miles apart and when their orbits separate most widely they are three times as far as that from each other. It is when the twin stars are nearest that we should expect them to be most active in sending out light waves and electrons. These reaching the sun might set up wild whirlings in the solar atmosphere, which would appear to us as an unusual abundance of

sunspots, and would affect the weather on the earth.

The dates when the two bright spheres of Alpha Centauri were nearest together and most radiant are 81.2 years apart and these fall on the years 1388, 1469, 1550, 1631, 1713, 1794, 1875 and 1956. Comparing these with the records of sunspots, which have been kept only for the last century and a half, we see that such evidences of solar disturbances were most evident in periods ending in 1794 and 1875, and that another period of high solar activity started in 1914 and may be expected to end about 1956.

If this theory of stellar influence is true we may expect something to

happen somewhere between 1950 and 1956. What it will be Professor Huntington does not venture to surmise, but he reminds us that in the years preceding 1388, when Alpha Centauri was active, Europe was a very uncomfortable place to live in. There were droughts and floods, famines and freezings. The Baltic was frozen so that horse sleighs could cross from Germany to Sweden, and the Danube and the Rhine sometimes inundated the cities on their banks and sometimes nearly dried up.

There are more serious grounds for suspecting Alpha Centauri of a malign influence on the earth for that star was nearest to the earth 28,000 years ago, being then only 3.2 light-years away. Now this is the date that geologists have set for the end of the last Great Ice Age so the approach and proximity of Alpha Centauri may have had something to do with that spell of cold weather which came near freezing out the human race. The world is even yet convalescing from the chills of the Gla-

cial Epoch. Greenland which once was really green with ferns and figs is still covered by an ice cap.

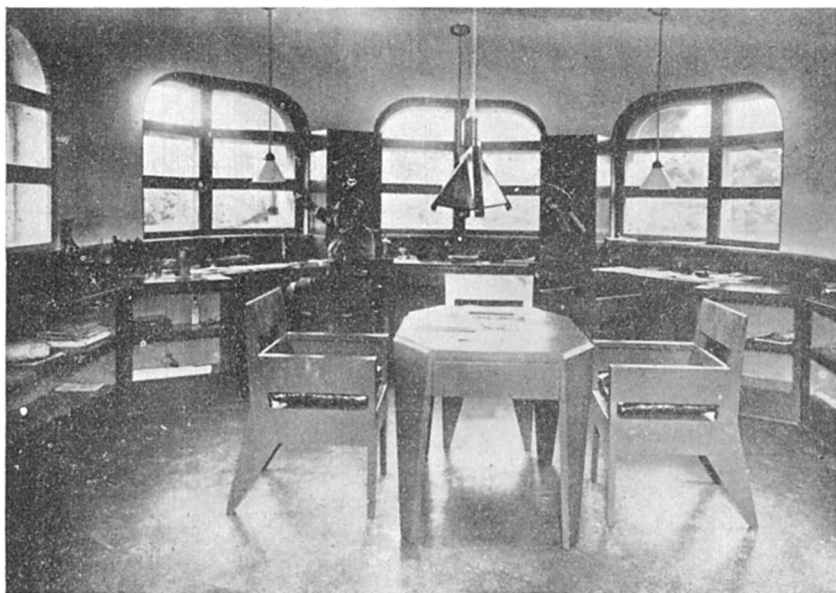
We need not fear another glacial age from the same cause for Alpha Centauri is now 4.3 light-years away and leaving us at the rate of thirteen miles a second. But Sirius is due in this vicinity in 65,000 years and that would be quite as—I should say, might be equally—bad for us.

But Professor Huntington endeavors to console us by reminding us that the human race not only survived several such periods of climatic stress, but has come out of them in each case stronger and better for the struggle for existence. He is a firm believer in the value of stormy weather. He is a New Englander.

#### NEW LIGHT ON THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

WAS the first living being a plant or animal? How could either originate out of non-existing matter?

These are questions that have hitherto baffled scientists. They could



*Wide World Photos*

A LABORATORY OF THE ASTROPHYSICAL OBSERVATORY BUILT FOR PROFESSOR EINSTEIN